

RADAR

KILLER SOLO

BRANDON FLOWERS HAS JUST RELEASED THE BEST ALBUM OF 2015...SO FAR... ACCORDING TO BRANDON FLOWERS, HE MIGHT BE ON TO SOMETHING. BY MICKEY STANLEY. PHOTOGRAPHED BY JAY HANNA

More than a decade after trading in his fake ID for a triple-platinum album, Brandon Flowers has outgrown most of his adolescent angst. There is, however, one thing from those early days that still follows the 33-year-old singer. "I'm a competitive person," says Flowers, pitched forward on his chair in a shaded poolside nook at West Hollywood's Sunset Marquis Hotel. In the months leading up to the release of a new album with The Killers, or, in this case, his second solo record, *The Desired Effect*, the Las Vegas-based musician scopes the opposition, warily. "I think, 'OK, it's April now,' and I'm just waiting for something to come out that I think might be better. So far, it hasn't," he says.

After churning out four chart-topping records as a frontman, it's odd to hear Brandon Flowers admit anxiety or emulousness, but he can't help it—he gets it from his mom. Born in Henderson, Nevada, Flowers is the youngest of six kids, including one brother, Shane, who was a gifted golfer. "He was 16 years old, and he was the best player in the state," he says. "But then Robert Gamez, who was in his same year, went on to the PGA Tour. My mom would say, 'There always seems to be somebody better.' It's not such a great trait that she passed on to me," he jokes.

His mom did, however, grant him permission to move to Las Vegas at 16, where he spent the last two years of high school living with his aunt. "I was free when I was a teenager," he says. "So I feel like I got a lot of the shenanigans and all of that stuff out of the way early. I didn't have parents, I was in Las Vegas, and I got a fake ID right away."

During this time, the casino-club scene was just coming on, and DJs were spinning in relative obscurity but laying the foundation of contemporary pop music. "Right now EDM is huge, and it's completely erupted into the biggest thing in Vegas," says Flowers. "So in 1998 or whatever it would have been when I was kind of doing...whatever I was doing, it was just taking off." The Killers' synth-seared arena rock may have borrowed from EDM's builds and bombast, though that's a chicken-and-egg argument.

Either way, 15 years later, dance music has taken hold, full-on. House-laden beats permeate most corners of pop, from radio-ready hip-hop to Top 40 country tracks. *The Desired Effect* absorbs some of this in its synth-and-bass-packed tunes while preserving Flowers's big dramatic voice, because, as the singer puts it, "there is still room for live music." Amen.

Nevada, despite hosting the City of

Sin, contains one of the largest Mormon populations outside of neighboring Utah. Flowers, a member of the Church, has long since abandoned any teenage misbehavior, and is now an avowed family man. He lives with his wife of 10 years, Tana, and their three boys in Vegas, making trips home from the road more frequently than most. "I always hear guys say three weeks is the longest. And three weeks is too long for me," he says. "So two weeks is the number we're gonna shoot for. And it's not prohibiting me from doing anything—it's just that I'm going to have to bring my family along. I'm lucky I'm able to do that."

One of the architects of *The Desired Effect* is Grammy-winning producer Ariel Rechtshaid (Vampire Weekend, Charli XCX, Haim, Beyoncé, Taylor Swift, etc.). "The first night, I probably played him 40 demos," says Flowers of the producer. "And I just do like a verse and a chorus and then I move on. I played him 'Still Want You' [the first single off the album]. I wasn't even going to play it, and that was

his favorite. That was a song that when he finally put his production on it, I knew I'd picked the right guy."

For Rechtshaid, collaborating with Flowers meant a locals-only tour of the singer's home base. "We'd drive by off-strip casinos he worked at growing up, even meeting Elton John for lunch at his Las Vegas home," says Rechtshaid. "At the studio, Brandon would play me a song on the piano—scary good piano player, amazing voice—he's one of the most prolific songwriters I've ever encountered."

Anyone concerned that Flowers's solo career is taking the place of a future Killers record needn't be. "The ball's already rolling," he says of a new album. Between family time, the band, his solo work, and touring, the singer's output is inexhaustible. So for Flowers, a competitive nature may be the small monkey on his back, but for fans it's the engine that produces mountains of great music. It's a monkey we can all be grateful for.



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